

**LONGFORM**

# Backyard Bloodbath, Part 2

What inspires young wrestlers to mutilate themselves with tacks and barbed wire? TV? Or dear old dad?

**BOB NORMAN** | **APRIL 12, 2001** | **4:00AM**



**Editor's Note:** This is the second and final installment of a series on a group of Coral Springs teenagers who make up Extreme Fuckin' Wrestling. The **first part** focused on 16-year-old John Ulloa, who started the enterprise and whose back yard was the setting for the February 24 show featured in this story.

Giovanni "Gio" Torres climbs the rungs of a 12-foot ladder and stands at the top, towering above a small crowd in John Ulloa's back yard. The 40 or so spectators call out for Gio to jump; they want to see him dive onto his friend, Jason Jelonek, who lies on a table below. The crowd's objective is clear: to see someone hurt.

Gio, a 16-year-old Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School junior who stands five foot seven and weighs about 125 pounds, needs courage. He already has thumbtacks stuck into his head, but that's no problem; the tacks sting only for a moment as they enter the skull. The dive, which he calls a "Senton Bomb," could break his neck. The ground is hard, and he has never jumped from such a height. Gio masks his fear with an inscrutable, determined expression as he surveys the scene. In his mind he pictures a huge man with a beer in his hand. Always a beer in his hand. He imagines the man is watching him from behind a

crash onto the boy on the table.

The man is his stepfather.

Gio, who goes by "Psycho" when he wrestles in the back yard, lands badly. Only his neck and head strike Jason, yet the impact is enough to break the table. Though he intended to fall squarely on his back before springing to the ground, he instead tumbles violently into the dirt. After lying flat for a moment, he knows he is really hurt. But he doesn't stop the show. Instead he calls to the referee, a bespectacled teen named John Summers, and quietly asks, "Did it look good?"

"Yeah," Summers replies.

It feels good to hear that, good enough to dull for at least a moment the terrible pain spreading through his chest.

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Gio finished the February 24 wrestling show, but he hasn't breathed easy since. The pain was constant for two weeks. He still doesn't know why it hurts so much. He wonders whether he cracked a rib or bruised a lung, but he'll likely never know because his mom, Maricela Crofts, so hates his backyard stunts that she refuses to take him to the hospital when he gets injured doing them. She wouldn't even ferry him to a drug store for an Ace bandage to wrap around his chest. He had to borrow one from a friend.

"He got hurt, like, once and I told him, "That's it, if you go over there and you get hurt, don't come crying to me, because you have to learn to deal with it," Crofts explains in a thick Puerto Rican accent. "The police have to stop them from doing this before someone really gets hurt."

Crofts wants the cops to stop Gio, because her son refuses to quit. He's as dedicated to backyard wrestling as his buddy and next-door neighbor, John. And like John, Gio saw his family break up years ago. His mother and father

growing -- at just five feet seven, he expects to get a little taller. His lips bulge over the braces he wears, and his shoulders and chest have been expanding since he recently began lifting weights. Gio is on the high-school wrestling team but is academically ineligible to compete. He desperately wants to be a full-fledged member of the school team and says he has maintained a B average this year (up from a D last year) in pursuit of that goal. But he concedes that his ventures with Extreme Fuckin' Wrestling are largely to blame for his scholastic woes.

Gio loves the backyard grappling; it's the fighting *inside* his house that disturbs him.

"[My stepfather] would drink, and he would snap at my mom," Gio says. "Other times he just yells at her and threatens her and throws her out of the house."

William Crofts declined to comment for this article, and Gio's mother says only that such things don't happen anymore. The worst incident, Gio says, occurred on the night of December 30, 1996. "I was in my room, and I heard all this yelling and crap, and I walked out there," he explains. "They were out on the patio, and my dad was drinking beer. He threw my mom in the pool. And then he started yelling at her and said, 'Get out of this house!' I've seen him push her, and it pisses me off. But what can I do? I was only five foot two then. He's six foot, 500 pounds."

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